DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 231 874 TM 830 466

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TITLE Evaluation 2083: A Hopeful View of the Future of our Profession. Publication # 82.69.
INSTITUTION Austin Independent School District, Tex.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, Montreal, Quebec, April 11-15, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; *Educational Diagnosis; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; *Evaluation; Evaluation Methods; *Evaluators; *Futures (of Society); Leisure Time; Parent Participation; Postsecondary Education; Preschool Education; School Districts
IDENTIFIERS Leisure Counseling

ABSTRACT

An optimistic creation of a desirable future for evaluators and evaluation is described. In 2083, Erica (the author's fictional evaluator) is assigned the responsibility for evaluating the education of all 3-20 year-old students in a given school area in Houston, Texas. Erica's work is divided into two parts: academic and social. Children are educated in basic skills via home computer under parental supervision. Erica collects assessments for each student (gathered at the end of each sequence of instruction) and has a skill file for each student. This profile is regularly scanned. A complete academic history is programmed and forwarded to an educational specialist, who, if needed, contacts the student or student's parent to work out a solution. Younger children receive skill development in special exploratory areas of their choice. Students age 14 and above have apprentice work activities. Erica assesses how well these experiences are going both for the student and for the employer. Once a month, Erica meets with other evaluators in her cluster. They review procedures, share evaluation results, and solve problems they have encountered. Erica meets with parents in the school to examine data and plan evaluations. With the creation of a national evaluation program, research findings are instantly disseminated nationally via electronic networks. (PN)

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EVALUATION 2083: A Hopeful View of the Future of our Profession*

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of
the American Educational Research Association
Montreal, Canada, April, 1983

TM 830 966

Publication #82.69

*With apologies to Gerard O'Neill

EVALUATION 2081: A HOPEFUL VIEW OF THE FUTURE OF OUR PROFESSION

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One of the most influential things that befell my thinking last year was a charge to do a review of Gerard O'Neill's book 2081, subtitled A Hopeful View of the Human Future. In hopes of capturing the same sense of optimistic creation of a desirable future expressed in that book I would like to create for myself and for you a sense of where the future of our profession may lead.

To set the mood which 2081 created for me I ask you mentally to think of yourself as a citizen of 1881 and a world dominated by horses, by quilting bees, by one room schoolhouses. Now think of being suddenly asked to envision 1981. Would you really believe that in a mere 100 years people would be able to talk instantly to persons across the continent, to have color images from New York entertain you in Montreal or California or Florida or Texas, to fly in a morning in a huge tank-like instrument from New York to San Francisco?

It is the premise of 2081 that current knowledge is sufficient to forecast a far more incredible future in the next 100 years than in the past. Some of the features of 2081 as envisioned are far flung:

- Space colonies that have relieved the world's overcrowding.
- Controlled environment cities such that Montreal could have surfers and mango trees.

- A robot who manages, cleans and runs the home and all its machines.
- The home serving as workplace.
- The home serving as school.
- Work weeks of a few flexible hours such that leisure assumes a major role in life.

Now using 2081's visions and my own dreams, I'd like to give you the world of evaluation in 2083 and tell you how Erica, an evaluator, lives and works in that era.

Erica works for Harris County Public Schools in Houston, Texas. Like most states, Texas has followed the trend which became well established in the late 1900's of dropping local or city school systems in favor of county school systems with fairly strong control by a state educational system.

Erica is an evaluator who is assigned the responsibility for evaluating the education of all 3 - 20 year-old students in a given school area in Houston. Erica's work can really be divided into the two parts of education: academic and social. In the 2083 Texas system, children are educated in basic skills via computer at home under the supervision of their parents. This instruction occurs 12 hours a week and exams are taken via computer at the end of each sequence of instruction in the basic areas. Erica collects the assessments for each student and has a skill file on each student in her area. This profile is automatically scanned on a regular basis and should erratic progress occur, Erica would receive an alert. She then programs a complete academic history and forwards this to an educational specialist who contacts the student or the student's parent and

works out a solution. Younger children in Erica's school also receive another 8 hours of skill development in special exploratory areas of their choice such as music, drama, crafts, and so forth. This instruction is provided by parents with interests matched and scheduled by the school system. Two days a week, scheduled by the days in which parents report to a central work place, students participate in group activities based on their individual learning programs. For example, piano students join string students at orchestra. Students with drama interests meet to work out media presentations. Science students collaborate on science projects. Erica is responsible for designing and administering survey instruments to evaluate participants' satisfaction with their in-school programs. Erica makes it a point to observe as many of the school group activities as she can.

Most of Erica's students age 14 and above have apprentice work activities for at least 10 hours per week. Erica is also responsible for assessing how well those experiences are going both for student and for employer.

Obviously Erica's work is quite extensive. Two things make it possible for her to get it all done. First, she bought T-Square, the Japanese robot she met in 2081 in Japan. He does all her household maintenance so she has no obligation of that sort. Also Erica does not herself have to do any data analysis or summarizing. All that is done in Austin by the State Education Agency. Erica must only report back to the Harris County School System any particular school needs she perceives and be available to individual parents for questions.

One morning of each month, Erica meets with other evaluators in

her cluster. They review procedures, share evaluation results, and solve the problems they have encountered. Another morning a month, Erica meets with the parents in the school to examine data and plan any particular evaluations they want. A third morning each month, Erica attends the countywide staff day in which various groups of the Harris County School System meet together to get general direction updates. The Superintendent also gives them a pep talk; some things never change!

Education is no longer troubled by many problems it encountered in 1983. The need for special education, for example, disappeared about 2030 when one genetic engineering program instituted in the year 2,000 finally began paying off. The need for compensatory education has similarly disappeared as poverty is generally gone. However, many parents still experience significant problems in providing students the leadership they need in their instructional programs, so continuing parent education is an important part of the Harris County Public School program. Erica does not have responsibility for evaluating this program, since her student age base is only 3 - 20.

New problems have emerged, of course. Now that there is so little link between achievement and ability, creativity has become much more important. So far, no genetic keys to creativity have been discovered. Therefore, a number of special educational efforts directed toward increasing creativity are being researched. Also, leisure counseling is a new, important activity with the purpose of assuring that students do sufficient exploration of different types of activities so that they can use their now abundant leisure time most enjoyably and beneficially.

The desire to make history come alive for students has resulted

in the creation of new "history islands." Students go and spend six week periods in these authentic slices of history to gain the feel and spirit of the age. The period is recreated to an exact decree. The mid 1900's era, for example, has black and white televisions, vintage cars, fixed telephones, and movie theaters. The pioneer villages and the cowboy towns remain the most popular experiences.

Erica's husband Larry also works in education, but for the Texas Education Agency. He travels to Austin one day a week for his group's work meeting. He is involved in a statewide research project on the course certification exams for the high school skills courses which had started out back in the 1900's as Advanced Placement Exams. There is some feeling that standards could be raised on these since so many students seem to be "topping out" on the exams. The other days Larry works in Houston at home.

Erica and Larry find their work very satisfying. The national evaluation program created when the National Assessment Program, NIE, and NCES were all joined in a National Center for Educational Quality Assurance has cited Harris County and Texas for exceptionally productive evaluation efforts. Both the state agency and the county contribute to national evaluation designs by doing data analyses that fit the overall pattern. Instant national dissemination of all research findings via the electronic networks means less wasted effort and duplication in research.

In my vision of our educational future you see that research and evaluation as education have become an even more important part of everyday life. Despite the pessimism that our current picture of budget cutbacks could create, we must keep our vision fixed on a more distant future in order that we may work vigorously to bring about the future that humankind needs.

Evaluation, although its form may change, will always be critically needed because evaluation, after all, is simply educational information. Who can imagine an "information age" where educational information is not of the essence?

REFERENCE

O'Neill, G. R. 2081, A Hopeful View of the Human Future. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1982.